

# Voices Against Stereotypes

SUGGESTED LEARNING STRATEGIES: SOAPSTone, Brainstorming, Close Reading, Marking the Text, Rereading, Word Map, Drafting

## What is a stereotype?

A **stereotype** is generally based on assumptions about a group of people based on race, gender, location, behavior, or physical traits. For example, many jokes and movies focus on the stereotype of the “dumb blonde” or the clueless “nerd” with glasses.

Stereotypes have been around a long time. They reflect the ideas that people have about others who are not like them in some way. When you hear someone describe a classmate as a “nerd” or a “jock,” you’re hearing a stereotype that is assigning that person to a category based on a label.

Stereotypes are not all negative; for example, “nerdy kids are smart” or “girls are better at intuition than guys” are positive stereotypes. Using either negative or positive stereotypes to describe people ignores the uniqueness of people by mischaracterizing who they are and what they think and believe as individuals.

## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

A **stereotype** is a fixed, oversimplified image of a person, group, or idea, or something conforming to that image.



## WORD CONNECTIONS

**Uniqueness** contains the root *-uni-*, from the Latin word *unicus* or *unus*, meaning “single or one.” This root also appears in *unison*, *unicorn*, *unicycle*, and *university*. The suffix *-ness* indicates that the word is a noun.

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## My Notes

## P o e t r y

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diane Burns (1957–2006) published only one book of poetry, *Riding the One-Eyed Ford* (1981), but she was a vivid presence in the New York City poetry scene in the 1980s. Admiring critics have described her poetry as “fierce,” “witty,” and “sardonic.”

Read the poem below and then complete the SOAPSTone activity that follows.

## Sure You Can Ask Me a Personal Question

Diane Burns  
(Lac Courte Oreilles- Cheemehuevi)

How do you do?

No, I am not Chinese.

No, not Spanish.

No, I am American Indi—uh, Native American.

- 5 No, not from India  
No, not Apache  
No, not Navajo.  
No, not Sioux.  
No, we are not extinct.
- 10 Yes, Indian.

Oh?

So that's where you got those high cheekbones.

Your great grandmother, huh?

An Indian Princess, huh?

Hair down to there?

Let me guess. Cherokee?

15

Oh, so you've had an Indian friend?

That close?

Oh, so you've had an Indian servant?

That much?

20

Yeah, it was awful what you guys did to us.

It's real decent of you to apologize.

No, I don't know where you can get peyote.

No, I don't know where you can get Navajo rugs real cheap.

No, I didn't make this. I bought it at Bloomingdales.

25

Thank you. I like your hair too.

I don't know if anyone knows whether or not Cher is really Indian.

No, I didn't make it rain tonight.

Yeah. Uh-huh. Spirituality.

Uh-huh. Yeah. Spirituality. Uh-huh. Mother

Earth. Yeah. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Spirituality.

30

No, I didn't major in archery.

Yeah, a lot of us drink too much.

Some of us can't drink enough.

This ain't no stoic<sup>1</sup> look.

This is my face.

35

## My Notes

<sup>1</sup> **stoic**, *adj.*, unaffected by emotions in the midst of adversity

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## A Close Reading of Text

SOAPSTone	Response	Textual Support
<b>Speaker:</b> Who is the speaker?		
<b>Occasion:</b> What is the social, cultural, historical, geographical context of the text?		
<b>Audience:</b> Who is the target audience?		
<b>Purpose:</b> What is the message of the text? Why was it written?		
<b>Subject:</b> What is the text about? What is the theme?		
<b>Tone:</b> What is the speaker's attitude toward the reader, subject, and audience?		